Redamancy

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Redamancy

by drinkbloodlikewine, whiskeyandspite

Summary

“What can I tell you, Jack? What do you want me to say beyond what I already have?” Will had sounded tired then, had rubbed his eyes, Hannibal is sure, had taken a sip of whiskey he had later tasted on his tongue. “He was gone when I got there. He was gone despite our dinner being arranged. Whatever plans he had for me, he no longer has. He left me behind when he had been adamant to take me with him.”

So often Hannibal kidnaps Will to take with him... but what would happen if Will felt inclined to make that move first?

In short, a Will-abducts-and-keeps-Hannibal fic, prompted by the INCREDIBLE phoenix1294!!

Notes

Our amazing prompt: *"I'd like a reversal of the "Will finds out the truth, Hannibal can't bring himself to kill Will and so keeps him in his basement/attic/cabin in the woods." In which Will realizes Hannibal is the Ripper, he knows Hannibal won't willingly stop and yet Will doesn't want to turn him over to the FBI or the inevitable BSHCI cell for reasons he can't admit to himself (yet).*

*I want smart-as-fuck Will who knows all the tricks actually being a match for Hannibal, and if that veers into Dark!Will territory I'm all for that also. Of course, Hannibal being Hannibal he does manage to escape a couple times, but that only gives his thought processes away to Will and earns him some punishment. *ahem*"*

We adjusted it just slightly to have them already be together before the "abduction" but there is enough manipulative Will in this to make Hannibal super proud. We also hope it isn't too heavy, we did have a few moments of comedy in there, which I think we enjoyed a little too much XD

In short, bb, we really hope you like it!

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

> *“If we go now,” Will murmurs, “it’s even riskier. So soon after he came here, angry, looking for you? When he knows you wanted to take me with you? He’ll think I’ve been kidnapped.”*
>
> *He snares Hannibal’s fingers in his hand, brings them to his lips, blue eyes lifting to study the lines turning down the corners of Hannibal’s mouth.*
>
> *“Just another couple of days,” Will assures him. “Just to smooth things over.”*

We could disappear now.

Tonight.

Feed your dogs, leave a note for Alana, and never see her or Jack again.

Almost polite.

Almost.

But not quite.

They had finished their dinner without further words when Will nodded silent assent to the suggestion, driven back to Wolf Trap down long roads unfolding only so far as the headlights brightened them. At Will’s suggestion, they left the Bentley behind and took his car together, a carry-on bag of Hannibal’s barest necessities slung into the back seat.

Hannibal had watched the house, left dark and still, as they pulled away.

Fingers clasped together between their seats, neither had spoken until they finally arrived.

Will had, in fact, fed the dogs, tending to each with none of the mournfulness that Hannibal might have expected, and explained in a voice that cracked that he couldn’t go tonight, not just yet. He had to pack his things. He’s never done this before. He was worried, of course, always worried - he knows he worries too much - about what will happen when they go. How to clear their trail. Who’ll take care of the dogs. If they’ll be noticed at the airports.

Hannibal had rested a hand against his cheek, pressed a kiss against his brow, and told him to breathe.

That was three days ago.

Now, the fog rolls in, and Hannibal thinks of how Will had once told him that he would walk into the field, far, far out into it until his feet felt numb and his mind quietened, and he would look back at his little lit house and imagine it a ship upon the ocean.

Despite Will's wavering notions, his hallucinations and paranoia, one thing he had said then, is what strikes Hannibal now as utterly, inarguably true.

It is *safe.*

Wolf Trap is a house as far from the world as it can get, it is quiet, it is filled with dogs and comfortable company, and Hannibal can feel the blood itch beneath his skin to get out, get away, move farther and actually *go* as they had agreed.

Disappear.

He supposes some logic would point to them having done so beneath the nose of the FBI, hidden - quite literally - in plain sight as Jack comes to visit the house, once, to confront Will, to have the man calmly tell him that he has no idea where Hannibal has gone, that he has as little knowledge of where he will end up as Jack himself does.

"But you had said, Will, you had *said* that you would hook him!"

"What can I tell you, Jack? What do you want me to say beyond what I already have?" Will had sounded tired then, had rubbed his eyes, Hannibal is sure, had taken a sip of whiskey he had later tasted on his tongue. "He was gone when I got there. He was gone despite our dinner being arranged. Whatever plans he had for me, he no longer has. He left me behind when he had been adamant to take me with him."

Jack had left unhappy, unsatisfied, seething as a blood hound having lost a trail, and Will had returned downstairs, leaning against the door frame with a small smile and his glasses finally off, whiskey glass still balanced beneath his fingers.

Now he stands closer, glass empty, and Hannibal merely lifts a brow.

"He will not believe that, Will, not another time." The implication is unspoken. Clear. *We should go. Together. Now.*

"What choice does he have?" asks Will. "He's got nothing beyond what I told him, and he can't force information out of me that he doesn't know I've got."

"And when he comes back again?" Hannibal responds, stepping closer to Will across the cold cement of the cellar where he sat waiting, motionless, as the conversation unfolded tersely above. Will watches, almost unbreathing, as the man nears him, and lifts a hand to trace the backs of his fingers down Will's cheek. "We have an opportunity, now. He has gone, afforded us time."

Will's eyes close, faint smile lingering still as he tilts into Hannibal's fingers.

"If we go now," Will murmurs, "it's even riskier. So soon after he came here, angry, looking for you? When he knows you wanted to take me with you? He'll think I've been kidnapped."

He snares Hannibal's fingers in his hand, brings them to his lips, blue eyes lifting to study the lines turning down the corners of Hannibal's mouth.

"Just another couple of days," Will assures him. "Just to smooth things over." The remaining distance is bridged between them when Will ducks to set his glass on the floor and wraps his arms around Hannibal's middle, ducking his head against the man's shoulder.

"Trust me, Hannibal."

Trust.

Trust is earned.

It had taken two days for the smell of Freddie Lounds to leave Will's clothing.

Hannibal wishes it would take so short a time to leave his memory.

Night pass quiet, here, almost impossibly so. The bed they share squeaks enough for Hannibal to notice but not enough for him to lose sleep over it. He finds himself less pleased with the canines that attempt to join them, with the fur they leave behind, but, surprisingly, not their company.

They are quiet things, relatively speaking, making their noise outside when they ever do. Otherwise it's soft whines and shuffling of tails and clicking of claws on the hardwood floor.

Every day, Hannibal checks the paper, reads the news. And every day he feels the nausea grow within him at not seeing his name there. If he did, he would at least know where they were looking.

With a thick murmur of dismay - for waking alone, for having to wake up so early at all - Will tosses the tangled sheets back onto the bed behind him before easing into a groaning stretch, and padding barefoot out to the kitchen. A glance spared towards the big windows - a grey day, dismal, rain spitting into the wind - before Will approaches the man at his kitchen table.

Warm arms drape around Hannibal's neck, cold nose against his cheek as Will nuzzles into a soft kiss.

"I wish I could wake up as early as you," he mutters with a crooked, sleepy smile.

He remains there a moment more, looking towards where Hannibal's hands hold the paper unmoving yet, and scanning the page without interest before he peels slowly apart to fetch a cup of coffee.

"I have to go in today," he says, shifting his weight onto one foot, the other atop it and away from the cold floor, sleep pants pooled around his feet. "It shouldn't be long."

Hannibal hums, folds the paper, brings a hand to his mouth to draw the side of his finger gently over and over until he feels the skin turn numb from it. Then he sets his hand against the table.

“The longer we put off leaving, Will, the less chance we have of actually doing so,” Hannibal murmurs, brows drawn as the kitchen fills with the sounds of the coffee machine, a thing Hannibal would abhor if it did not produce such divine coffee.

“It is inevitable that they will go to my home, that they will find evidence there that neither of us will be able to deny. Only a matter of time before they seek you as the primary witness, as the only one to ever get close enough.”

Another hissing splutter of the machine and Hannibal turns away from it.

“A matter of time that we cannot waste, Will. You said you would go. That we would. I see no reason to put it off longer than we have. I fear,” he stops, takes a breath, holds it, and sighs it through his nose. In the silence preceding the mug being pushed his way across the counter, one of the dogs noses the screen door open to get outside.

“Don’t,” Will says, expression drawing into something near a smile that doesn’t quite reach his eyes. “Don’t fear, Hannibal, please - that,” he draws a breath, eyes dropping to where his fingers brace around the hot mug in his hands. “That will *kill* us. Fear. Doubt. Mistrust.”

Without yet taking a sip, he watches Hannibal sidelong, not yet meeting his eyes, his own expression drawn, distant.

“Hannibal,” he begins again, tongue parting his lips, and brows drawing in above eyes dark as stormswept seas. “I’ve run circles around doctors. Therapists. Behavioral scientists. The FBI, Hannibal, I’ve - I’ve fooled them before, readily, more than once.”

A swallow, rough, and he ducks his head, expression drawn into a grimace of contrition and bitter humor, both.

“You.”

He pushes aside his coffee, yet untouched, and turns to Hannibal, gentle hands curling in the lapels of his coat, leaning onto his toes to take a kiss from his unhappy mouth. “What if we stayed?” Will ventures. “What if we didn’t have to go?”

Hannibal makes a warning sound and finds that too kissed away. There is a tightness, cool, not yet cold, that drums against his heart like the slow tapping of fingers on a desk.

“How do you envision a life here, Will, with all of this? Everything that we would have left, here, behind us, instead around us?” Hannibal gently sets his hand against Will’s chest, pushes him back.

“You would perhaps find yourself unhindered. After months, perhaps years at most. You would find your history just that. But you cannot truly believe that the same would be for me.”

Hannibal takes up his mug, meets Will's eyes with a look he could almost convince himself is indifferent.

"We will go," he says, a gentle pressure that allows little argument. "We must."

Lower lip caught between his teeth, and attention turned to watch Winston pad across the kitchen, Will draws a deep breath and nods once.

"We will," agrees Will softly, unable to pull back the ache in his voice, the softening of his shoulders. "I just - it's not -"

The mug clicks against the counter as Hannibal sets it aside, and it's enough for Will to seek him out, smaller somehow as he sinks against the man, desperation in the tightness of his arms.

"It's not easy," he breathes. "It's not easy for me, to just - leave my life, my dogs, my home, to just *go*." Shaking his head, Will sighs out something that if not for the tightness of his ribs might sound like a laugh. "I'm not you. But we'll - we'll go. We will."

Conviction, shaky, worried, but there, inevitably there. Memories of words that were true, between them, despite anything else. After everything else. Similar tone, similar weight behind the words. A genuine belief that this will happen, though the timeline is not set in stone, not inevitable.

Not yet.

"You need to pick up more food," Hannibal tells him after a while, "if you wish for me to make you dinner."

It's a soft thing, careful, but for the moment an unspoken acceptance of Will's terms and fears. Perhaps, with the allowance of time they have, small as it is, they can do this, give Will the time to think and plan.

Relief unfurls rapidly and Will's arms slip around Hannibal's neck, pulling them together in earnest, mouths closed together in a lingering kiss.

Will laughs now, a little sound but entirely genuine, as their lips part and he whispers, "Thank you, Hannibal. For being so patient with me."

They kiss again and Will lowers back onto his heels, hands framing Hannibal's face. Though the domesticity of it wells warm between them, it is not carefree, not the same as the chilly mornings spent wrapped beneath Will's soft flannel sheets, curled together and piled with dogs. There are hunters at the doorstep, Hannibal knows, and too much complacency is when the knock will come.

"I'll try to come home right after class," Will tells him, taking another little kiss, and then another. "So long as no one at the Bureau needs me. Will you wait for me to cook with you?"

A deep sigh, a nod. And it's enough for one more day, one more promise and one more lingering tally against Hannibal's personal count. Patience has limits. Trust can only stretch

so far.

He will wait simply because it is not advantageous to move yet alone. The FBI are on full alert with Jack's caution, but one more week and Hannibal's absence from any radar, any airports and boatyards and trains, his lack of movement across the country, to another, through a third and into thin air will be noted, will be suspicious.

Jack is not a stupid man. He will seek the one person Hannibal wanted to take with him and somehow left behind.

Hannibal cannot leave without Will, he does not want to. But Will's indecision chips away at an innate primal fear Hannibal cannot silence.

One more day, perhaps, two.

And then Will would not find him in Wolf Trap, Virginia. He would not find him at all.

"If you are late, the dogs will help," Hannibal cautions him.

"I imagine they will anyway," grins Will in response, a furtive little look that betrays his utter relief that Hannibal has acquiesced in this.

Again.

But Hannibal's expression is unchanged, and Will traces the tense muscles of his face with gentle fingers, hoping perhaps to sooth it away, to comfort, to reassure Hannibal that they are here, together, and for now they are safe.

"Is it so terrible?" he asks softly, a question that Will of everyone needs not ask to know the answer to, writ across the terse line of Hannibal's mouth as clear as the headlines on the newspaper he held moments before.

Less and less, Hannibal brings Will against him, not like the first night when every touch was consolation and comfort to ease the rattle of Will's nerves from where they itched beneath his skin. He does not draw him close now, either, and so Will buries himself deep instead. His arms secure around Hannibal's middle, the soft wool of his waistcoat - worn despite having no appointments, now, nowhere to go - a familiar warmth against bare arms chilled by the wet morning.

"It is dangerous," Hannibal finally answers, relenting enough to rest a hand against the small of Will's back, to trace the ridges of his spine beneath the thin t-shirt he wears. Relenting enough to press his mouth to Will's hair and breathe him in, though the memory of betrayal stings in his nose, and he closes his eyes.

Will doesn't argue the point, but merely finds the softness of expensive cotton beneath his lips, soft, simple kisses traced over his heart. It beats for him, in spite of him, would beat without him, both know, a cruel but necessary fate it might be, and Will sighs warmth against his chest.

“Two lectures, groceries, and then home,” promises Will, before finally peeling away from Hannibal’s loose embrace to gather up his mug from the counter and carry it back to the bedroom to find his clothes.

It is dark by the time Will returns, the paper grocery bag dissolving in the downpour that has shaken the sky apart. He cradles it in both arms as he kicks the screen door open and wades into the furry mass at his feet.

“Christ,” he mumbles, hair stuck wet to his face, coat soaked through. “What a fucking night.”

Hannibal watches, long enough for the dogs to properly greet their master, before standing to take the bag from Will’s unresisting hands, set it to the counter. Will’s fingers Hannibal takes between his own, a brisk rubbing between his palms to warm them.

"You should shower,” he advises, knowing Will would snort at the obvious suggestion but take it regardless.

"The storm is tearing the forest apart," Will says, an entirely absent comment, meaningless beyond the fact that they can hear the trees groan from the weight of it.

Will does a quick mental headcount of all the creatures in his care and find two dogs missing. The largest and a smaller, and sighs. He knows they will return, he simply hopes they do before he locks up, hopes they do not force him outside to find them.

The fire burns bright and warm in the grate already and Will brings a hand up to peels his wet hair from his forehead.

"It is in the nature of storms to cause havoc, and around it bring life," Hannibal notes, bringing his hands up to work Will’s jacket from his shoulders, intent to hang it by the fire.

Will lets his arms loose for the wet coat to be slid from them, shaking his hands briskly and warming them against his arms before following Hannibal towards the fire. Fingers stretched towards it, a quick shiver snares him.

“How very human,” he answers, a tired bemusement in his words. “Am I too late to help with dinner?”

With a hum, Hannibal steps behind Will to settle his arms loosely around him, and work free the buttons on the cold, soaked flannel that clings to goosepimpled skin. “Since you were bringing the groceries, no,” he responds, a trace of amusement in his words as Will leans back against him, earning a note of disapproval as he dampens Hannibal’s clothes with his own. Will loops his arms up around Hannibal’s neck and leans up to kiss his jaw.

For a moment, they are both warm.

For a moment, it is easy to forget.

For a moment, before Hannibal reminds himself just how dangerous those moments can be.

“I took the liberty of packing your things for you,” he murmurs against Will’s neck. “I hope you will forgive me doing so. You may wish to go through the bag to see if there is anything I have forgotten.”

The next shiver isn’t from cold, but feels no less pleasant as it crackles up Will’s spine, and down his arms, nearly enough to draw the breath from him. A heartbeat, another, before he turns in Hannibal’s arms and stretches back to drop his sopping shirt to the floor, pushing their lips together in a kiss of polarities, all ardent chill and cold heat.

Hannibal knows this tension, knows this displeasure of being made to accept a change one Is not yet fully prepared for. But one more day, one more storm that they weather together, is still together.

Hannibal allows his own shirt to be worked open, damp from where Will had leaned against him, allows his hands to frame Will’s face as he opens himself to this. And he knows that this is why he is still here. Despite his better judgment, despite his honed instincts.

Because he does not want to leave behind the only man he has ever let see him, the only man who had chosen to stay after doing so.

Cold hands slide over his chest and Hannibal hums.

"Dinner,” he reminds Will quietly, feels the corners of his eyes soften into into a smile when Will laughs and makes a soft noise of wheedling discontent. "You need to get warm."

"I'm trying."

Coy, quiet, and Hannibal considers how pleasant it is to see Will this way when he knows the power of the man, his cleverness, his quick mind and deft hands.

"Shower," Hannibal smiles, allows another kiss before extricating himself and kissing Will on the forehead. "And I will start on dinner."

Will keeps their fingers twined until returning to the kitchen, Hannibal’s fall away from his, and with a sigh, he watches him go before padding on wet socks back to the bedroom and stripping bare from the rest of his rain-soaked clothes.

A glance is spared to the bag on the bed, the clothes inside neatly folded, interspersed with books and papers that Will might think worth taking. He doesn’t need to look closer to know that, in fact, they are exactly what he would want to take, had he actually thought about leaving to that point.

He hasn’t, of course, and the sight of the bag coils cold in his belly before he goes to shower, and warm the chill out of his skin.

By the time he’s finished, wrapped in an oversized sweatshirt and warm pants, the house smells like a home again, substantial and filling. Satisfying. On slippered feet he approaches Hannibal and sinks into him from behind as he cooks, cheek against the man’s shoulder.

“I’m glad you’re here.”

Some more tension melts from Hannibal's shoulders. Something so familiar about Will warm and heavy against him, saying soft truths that mean more than anyone else's gilded lies.

He brings a hand up to hold against Will's wrist and presses back into the hold, accepting it, warming to it. He turns, enough to catch Will's eyes, to see the man smile at him and blink, tired, now, sleepy almost. But he still takes up the knife Hannibal passes him to chop the vegetables for their stew.

"I'm glad you're home," Hannibal replies. "Some of the dogs were very agitated by the storm. Others, I feel, enjoyed it a little too much."

As though on cue, the screen door bangs open and a very wet, very filthy creature pounds its way in, fur weighed down by water and mud, making it seem almost bigger than it is. The dog gives them both a wide grin, tongue lolling, and Will manages to get around the kitchen island and grab it before it can shake, taking the dog to the bathroom to hose him off with the shower, dropping the towel to the floor after for the dog to roll in.

Hannibal says nothing when Will returns, sleeves of his hoodie wet and muddy, now, lips twisted in a wry half-smile.

"Your smallest has buried himself under the sofa cushions," Hannibal continues as though nothing had passed, "and Winston has taken up residence against your pillow."

Will glances back to his bed, no sign of his pillow beneath the fluffy beast curled atop it, and glances towards poor Buster - or his tail, rather, the only part of him visible from where he's lodged himself. He turns his attention back to Hannibal then, shoving his sleeves up to his elbows with little mind for the mess before washing his hands.

"And how have you weathered the storm?" he grins. "In my absence."

"Patiently."

Taking up the knife again, Will sets to work, lazy strokes of blade against the board, scraping softly in the silence beneath the sounds of rain.

"You're good at this," Will remarks, a warmth darkening his cheeks from more than just the cold. "Taking care of them. Taking care of me," he adds, with wry amusement, before his smile falters a little, eyes intently focused on separating the carrot into even chunks. "We should have done this sooner."

Hannibal allows a brief quirk of lips in genuine pleasure.

"Perhaps," he agrees. He does enjoy the companionship, the warmth, the conversation and the comfort of having someone he can trust - *trust is earned…* - so close, so often. The dogs he has found to be oddly pleasant company, and his responsibilities towards them end at opening and closing the door for them when they want to go out.

Though he finds himself more often than not feeding them elaborate meals, or scraps that could pass for such, when he cooks.

“This routine can follow us where we go,” Hannibal adds. “A comfort of familiarity in a different setting.”

It’s meant to soothe, to remind Will that despite the changes a lot stays the same, the things that matter to them both will stay.

Will hums softly in assent to the words, and leans a little into Hannibal’s side as he cooks. A constant presence, familiar, at his side, rarely out of touch with the other as they tend the stew, observe the dogs, comment on the strengthening or weakening of the storm still raging outside.

Even when they sit to eat, there is touch shared between them. Will toes off his slippers and gently kicks them aside - one snared by a passing dog - and wedges his feet beneath Hannibal’s thigh, a faint amusement and no necessary comment in the gesture.

With bowls nearly emptied, the fresh-baked bread and sweet butter eaten by themselves and certain enterprising dogs, Will clears his throat a little, brows knitting.

“I had to go in today,” he murmurs. “To the bureau.”

Hannibal’s eyes slowly shift up to regard Will, a long look, a deep calming breath and he looks away. If there are no agents kicking down the door then the trust is still there, slowly rebuilt, tested and tempered.

“Is there another case?” he asks.

Spoon idling in circles in the remnants of his dinner, Will pushes his feet a little deeper.

“You could say that,” he answers. For a moment, he sucks his bottom lip between his teeth, worries it there in a gesture that both know reads as nervousness, tension raising as electric as the weather outside. “Yes.”

He releases the spoon to clink against the bowl, and leans back in his chair, hands stuffed into the pockets of his sweatshirt, and finally turns his attention up towards Hannibal, watching the man from beneath his hair.

“They went to the house.” It comes out all at once, a gust of words, driving against the tenuous calm in which they’ve surrounded themselves. “The basement. There was a meeting. Hannibal -” Will begins, but there isn’t much to say, really, there isn’t much to do, certainly, and his breath stops in his chest, entire body taut. “Hannibal…”

Hannibal stills in a way that few people can manage. He goes entirely still. His breathing ceases, eyes settle on Will, lips purse, shoulders hunch. In a moment, he becomes something cold, a statue in the middle of a storm.

“On whose word?” he finally asks, tone too calm, too soft, and Will swallows.

“Jack wanted to… do something.”

“Jack.”

Will's brows furrow and he realizes the implication behind the words. There is a moment of silence, his jaw works and his head tilts a little, before a tight smile appears.

"Who else?"

Rain crackles against the windows, no other sound between them, and no answer given to his question, despite every intention of forcing Hannibal to say what he means, and Will utters a rough laugh as he rubs a hand across his face.

"After everything," he murmurs. "After everything - Hannibal, it was Jack. You heard him the other day. You said it yourself, that he wouldn't let this go. It's a good thing he had me to the meeting, isn't it? It's a good thing that I was there so I know. Know what they're doing, know what they've found - know that they trust me, still."

"And can I?" It's a terse question, rhetorical. Will knows well enough that were it directed literally, it would not be directed. He would find a knife in his gut and perhaps not be found at all, himself. Again, he swallows, and after a pause, Hannibal pushes to stand from the table, a hand up against his face in a slow rub over his eyes.

"What has been the use of us waiting?" Hannibal asks carefully, not looking at Will yet, one hand against his hips in an angry gesture. "Is this enough for you to understand that we *should have gone*?"

Will doesn't stand when Hannibal does, but merely draws his feet back beneath his chair. Coiled, his body constricted in on itself, ready to move as soon as Hannibal does. He watches the man's hand on his side, the tautness of his posture, and knows that it's fear, not anger, and more's the better for the nearness of the knives on the counter.

His brow furrows.

He wouldn't. Not Hannibal.

"I told you," he responds softly. "I told you it isn't that easy for me. To just leave all of this, to just *go*, Hannibal, I -" Will presses his fingers to the bridge of his nose, forcing his voice to steady. "It's not as bad as it seems. It's bad, but it could be worse. They don't know you're here. They still trust me enough to have me 'help', to keep me informed. If we had left already, we wouldn't have any idea what they're doing, and now we're near enough to them to know."

A frustrated sound, a hand against Hannibal's lips before he drops both at his sides and ducks his head, another slow breath, jaw working, eyes closed, and then Hannibal straightens, releases a breath and moves to gather his plate and Will's to take to the kitchen.

He can't deny the truth of the words but he cannot hide his frustration that it has had to get so far, that Jack would push by instinct to go to the house now empty and find everything Hannibal wanted never to be found.

He considers how it could be worse, how it would have been, had they perhaps gone sooner. But something tugs at him, something *else*, suggesting that had they gone, they would be

gone, they would not need to even worry about the investigation, about Jack Crawford or the BAU at all. The irritation rises like bile and Hannibal swallows it, knowing that time is frustratingly impossible to reverse and adjust, and even if it were possible it would carry its own consequences.

“Our things are packed,” Hannibal says finally, voice low, feigning calm, “and they are directing their attention elsewhere. We will go. Tonight. While we have the advantage.” He looks up at Will when he can feel the other man about to argue. “Or I will go alone.”

Now Will stands, to make his way with hesitant steps to press aside Hannibal again. Though the man resists him - Will can feel the snap of muscles in his arms - he frees his hands from where they press against the counter and brings both to his mouth, breath warm against his palms.

“There’s not going to be any flights out tonight, Hannibal,” Will intones softly, no argument in his words, but a calm statement of fact. “Not in this storm. Everything is going to be delayed until tomorrow.”

A hard swallow catches in his throat, and Will allows his eyes to close, pressing a soft-stubbled cheek against Hannibal’s hand, an eminent trust in the gesture, and an ache in his words.

“Please don’t go without me,” he breathes. “We’re packed. We’ll go. Tomorrow, once the storm has settled from tonight. First thing.”

Once this storm has settled.

Once this excuse goes away.

Hannibal does not relent beyond curling his fingers softly against Will’s face, beyond allowing Will to step closer. He says nothing.

He just tallies one more day.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> *Hannibal takes his time to get up, to gather his clothes and make his way to the shower. By the time he returns, Will hasn't moved further than to lean his weight against the counter. Still bare, body lax and languid, hair a mess. Soft bruises bitten against his shoulders that will take several days to fade.*

The storm lasts two days. A divine comedy by someone with pitch-black humor. Hannibal counts the hours. He barely sleeps. Finds himself coaxed to turn by soft fingers and softer words, promising always another few hours until the day ends, until the storm ends, until the trouble does and they can go.

"Together," Will purrs against him, lip between his teeth and brows drawn in pleasure as they rub together, close, enough to be a comfort but not enough to take Hannibal away, not enough to ease his mind or empty it.

On the third night he sleeps on the couch.

"Tonight, Will."

From beneath the heaps of blankets and piles of twitching dogs, Will drags himself up to sit with an unhappy noise, realizing that neither the warmth against his chest or that against his back are the man now speaking to him. Glowing red as embers, the early morning sun burns far too bright in cresting the horizon, clouds finally parted, and Will regards it through the curtains with disdain.

"Shit," he sighs.

Hannibal has slept poorly, if at all, and though already attired, his clothing bears none of the perfect creases and tidiness of having been pressed. His hair has slipped into his face, and if not for the dark circles beneath his eyes, and the particular line of his mouth, Will would think him particularly handsome in this moment.

Instead, he thinks him particularly *irritable*, and scoots against the wall of dogs at his back to make room in the bed beside him.

"If we're going tonight, then we don't have to be up yet," Will reasons, before adding, with quiet bemusement as he sinks back into his pillow. "It's my day off."

A sigh, and no telltale dip in the mattress suggesting Hannibal has joined him. Will turns to regard him again, hands in his pockets, now, eyes to the window.

“It will not be,” Hannibal murmurs. “Jack will call you in to consult on the matter of the house and its previous occupant.” A slow slide of his eyes, an eyebrow gently rising. “You are quite the expert on him.”

There is, surprisingly, no malice in the words, merely an implication of an impending inevitability, and Hannibal moves past the bed again, pacing like a caged animal, before making his way to the kitchen to work the coffee maker and set it going with hissing splutters and drips.

“He’ll call me tomorrow,” Will corrects, “once the house has been searched and cleaned and my existence and life with aforementioned previous occupant comes to a new light.” A quirk of his lips and Will forces himself to sit up and sling his feet aside, not even bothering to check his watch to know it’s *too damned early*.

“And tomorrow I will not be here,” Will adds quietly, rubbing his eyes as his toes rest against the cold wooden floor. “We will not be.”

Hannibal says nothing from the kitchen, eyes still on the sky that by the moment, turns from blood to fire to the cool balm of an overcast but no longer stormy day.

Will allows himself a sigh, curling his toes away from the ground and shoving them into his slippers. He shuffles out to snare his coat from where it hangs, still, by the fireplace and shoulders into it, pulling it around himself to drag himself to the door and let the dogs out into the field. They bang and clatter past him, relieved to be given their freedom after so many days inside, and Will wanders out onto the porch to stand and watch them frolic.

He won’t force conversation on Hannibal. Won’t force his hands or mouth against him either, if it isn’t what the man wants, made clear enough by his avoidance. Legs chilled by the brisk, wet air, Will tucks his coat beneath his butt and seats himself on the top stair of the porch, arms against his knees.

They should have done this sooner. Spent more mornings together, returned to each other at night, not only for dinners and sessions. Time wasted, when perhaps Will could have been a stronger influence on the man now battling with the old coffee-maker inside - could have gotten him to stop, maybe, if they hadn’t been so stubborn, if they hadn’t been so blind, if if if…

Will allows a faint smile, unseen by any.

Not everyone is lucky enough to have a second chance, he reminds himself. And not everyone who gets that is bright enough to recognize it when it happens and act.

He does not stay outside long enough to get fully cold, and leaves the screen door unlocked for the dogs to return at their leisure when he comes back in and accepts the mug of coffee passed to him.

“We cannot go through the public airports now,” Hannibal says softly, taking a drink and drawing his lips back from the heat and bitterness of the drink, relishing the taste. “There are private ones available. Transport out of the city entirely, by other means, if we wished to

cover our tracks further. Outside of America we will find little difficulty, our challenge lies within the initial flight."

Will doesn't argue. Doesn't comment. Doesn't have anything to say about it, really. Doesn't care, he might even venture, but only because this is all so entirely irrelevant. Lips curved against the chipped rim of his mug, he listens to Hannibal, makes sure to really hear him because as soon as he tunes out the man will know, and makes agreeable noises as he sips, steam fogging his glasses.

"Aren't you curious where we'll go?" Hannibal finally asks.

Will shrugs, no more than the suggestion of a smile across his lips. "I trust you."

"No preferences?" the man coaxes. "Nowhere you've wanted to visit? The world will be open to us, no tethers to bind us."

To any place.

To any person.

"It hardly matters then, does it?" Will responds.

Hannibal - as Will knew he would be - breathes, now, when talking about it, eased by the seeming certainty of their plans, and he takes a step nearer to Will, who makes no gesture to do the same. For days Hannibal has grown fearsome, pacing caged, driven to sit for hours on end in a particular chair, to cook meals simply to feed them to the dogs, or - as the night before - to yank back the sheets and slip from beneath Will's gentle hands to not again be silenced by the movements of Will's mouth against his skin.

Calmer now, and so when Will takes his coffee and paces back towards bed, all oversized coat and bare legs, the invitation is clear.

Our last day like this Will murmurs, as their mouths and bodies meet beneath the twisted sheets.

Tonight breathes Hannibal, when they part only to sink together again.

And with the day so spent, the night comes sooner than either might have anticipated.

And so as night comes, Will does no more than tug his boxers back over narrow hips, dig his feet into his slippers, and glance out past the porch to ensure the dogs - most of them - are still at play.

Behind him, Hannibal takes his time to get up, to gather his clothes and make his way to the shower. By the time he returns, Will hasn't moved further than to lean his weight against the counter. Still bare, body lax and languid, hair a mess. Soft bruises bitten against his shoulders that will take several days to fade.

"We can reheat something from last night," Will offers over his shoulder and Hannibal feels a strange sort of… longing. A knowledge that despite the words and the promise and the trust,

Will's entire being refuses to leave, it cannot let go, despite his best intentions. Despite Hannibal's gentle pleas.

"We can pan fry the rice to go with the remaining stir fry," Hannibal confirms, knows Will smiles by the way he shifts his shoulders and stretches his neck before turning and confirming the expression.

Hannibal just draws his fingers down Will's cheek before passing him to take up the coat from the hook.

"We need firewood."

Outside, the rains have done damage to some trees, broken branches litter the ground and some still cling to the trees from which they were torn. The wind has picked up again, though the rain has not come during the day, the ground given time to settle from endless mud to something a little more stable.

Hannibal makes his way to the shed, settled against the side of the barn on Will's property. Within, the logs are admirably dry, only heavy with condensation from the day not the rain itself. Hannibal takes his time selecting them, something meditative in the process, finding which would more aptly fit the fireplace, which would burn longer due to their girth and mass.

Beyond, the forest sings in the wind, a strange symphony of creaking and hisses, an occasional whistle when the wind finds its way through the smaller of the gaps between the trees. Hannibal listens a long time, committing the sound to memory, committing the day to his mind palace, a special space just for this temperature and this smell of damp and pine. Just this night.

When Hannibal returns, Will is no longer watching out the window. The sound of the shower makes it clear where he has taken himself and for a moment Hannibal does not move beyond resting his weight on the counter, feeling how heavy the logs are against his chest, pressing to his fingers where he curls them.

On the stove, a pan sits on low heat, rice within, already mixed with chopped egg, cooked in the same pan not moments before. Hannibal has to smile, has to close his eyes and breathe it in. Remember.

"Hannibal," Will calls out, shutting off a shower. "Do you know how to make egg rolls?"

The pipes clunk in the quiet of the house, and Will ruffles his towel through his hair, bare feet pressed into the worn-down rug beside the shower.

"Hannibal?"

It takes three steps outside of the bathroom for Will to realize that Hannibal is not in the kitchen.

And three steps more to realize he's not in the house at all.

The towel falls to the floor behind him, a flurry of movement that sends the dogs barking interspersed with hissed curses. Pants are yanked over bare hips, a shirt snatched from out of the bag Hannibal had folded so neatly for him and pulled on against still-damp skin, and he snatches up his boots to shove his feet into, upturning Hannibal's bag onto the bed in the process.

A blink to survey the contents.

No passport.

Another blink, towards the nightstand.

No wallet.

Confirmation of what Will already knew, but enough to tighten his jaw and narrow his eyes. Five minutes, no more than ten, and the keys were days ago stashed in a rotating set of odd locations around the house, so he must be on foot.

Flashlight grabbed from the drawer, laces dangling untied from his boots, shirt yet unbuttoned, he stops at the door and returns to his room for one last thing.

And with rifle in hand, bangs open the screen door and catches sight of the tracks laid just deep enough into the mud.

Will whistles, finding three dogs charging alongside him as he sets his light on the path, eyes narrowing when they shift onto patches of grass. "Come on," he frowns. "We're gonna go find Hannibal."

The woods are lovely, dark and deep…

Hannibal does not think of the promises he had once made in a forest, surrounded by snow that muffled everything but their breath, quick and shuddering and weak. He does not think of how brutally they had been broken for him.

Instead he keeps his eyes ahead, a flashlight taken but forgone for the time being, eyes currently trained to the forest floor where the moon breaks through the branches enough to light it. The mud has swallowed everything, making for easier access over placed that had once been a tangle of branches and leaves. Now Hannibal merely keeps his balance as best as he can, hands out to catch the thin trees when he's close enough, at his sides when he isn't.

He has kept as close to the main road as he could, safely, without being seen by the headlights of any passing cars, of Will's were he to seek Hannibal that way. It's colder, now, the water no longer condensing and now settling heavy against Hannibal's bones to weigh him lower, slower.

He slips, catches himself on his knee and watches his breath fog in front of him as he moves to right himself. A moment to catch his breath, eyes turned to the sky now crisp and clear and burning bright with countless stars.

Remember.

Finding the ground beneath his feet again, adjusting to the give of it, Hannibal sets off slower than before. Time enough between them now that he should not rush and turn an ankle. Time enough for Will to search the house for him, the shed, to battle with himself about whether or not he should risk calling him. Time enough to realize that Hannibal would never have his phone with him, and sink to the bed.

A shake of Hannibal's head smothers the thought before it has time to breathe, focused instead on the rough bark beneath his fingers and the frigid wind that careens down the road to his left, funneled through the canyon of asphalt and trees.

It is easier this way - a necessary cruelty to do what Will could not. Every delay and every excuse a choice, to stay with the home he knows rather than the safety they would be assured together.

A choice, that despite Will's gentle protestations, means they cannot be together.

Not yet, at least. Perhaps he will come, Hannibal tells himself, because there is little other comfort to be found here, now. Once Hannibal has settled, left his bread crumbs, maybe then he'll finally be ready to come.

And miles to go before I sleep

Hannibal only pulls the flashlight free when clouds cover the moon up and the path before him fades to nothing at all, but he does not turn it on. For a moment he simply stands in darkness, forces his eyes to stop taking control, to let his hearing guide him instead.

He listens.

He hears nothing for long enough to hear his heart, and then he hears everything.

The sound of leaves in the wind above his head, of quiet shuffling of other creatures within the forest. Nearby, somewhere, is a stream, or perhaps the remnants of rain, trickling down rock and branch in a steady drip.

Hannibal can hear his breathing, labored somewhat from the hike, unsteady with the uncertainties playing in his mind. Then nothing, once more, a breath of utter emptiness before a familiar sound, one that does not belong to these woods but belongs to those within Hannibal: the crunch of snow underfoot, unsteady steps, little.

The flashlight cuts like a blade through the brush and Hannibal hears only his slow exhale before the rest of the forest returns to him. He casts the beam one way, then another, before continuing forward, careful to keep the light down, his hand over the top to not let it spread upwards against the leaves and give him away.

He knows the woods are cruel, that in them lie shadows and sounds with the ability to appear as many things. Primal chicaneries to persuade one off their path - stories mothers tell their children of wolves who call for help in human voices, only to see them consumed.

The sound of laughter, sighing deep, stops his steps for a moment before Hannibal realizes it is his own.

The promises he made to her and him are not erased by the context of how they were broken. He knows this with certainty. Snow squeaking softly in time with his steps behind him - though there is no snow behind him - draws a breath too short in his lungs, forces it out in another dire laugh, made grey past his lips.

Hannibal wonders if perhaps Will Graham will someday haunt him too, to make him remember. If he might some days feel the gentle pressure of another body against his side as he is cooking, or a soft sigh against the back of his neck at night.

Ghosts at his heels, and to them he breathes an apology, carried away on the rising wind that shakes the storm-stripped branches overhead.

On he walks and it feels almost aimless. Surely he has walked far enough to be able to use the road instead? Surely it would be safer than what he imagines in the darkness around him?

Perhaps it is a test of madness and endurance, leaving behind two people he had opened his heart to, because circumstances dictate that he could do nothing else.

His steps falter as Hannibal slips against another loose branch and catches himself against a supple tree, his back pressed to it, eyes closing for just a moment as the tree slithers through his sensation to become something else entirely, its own fate, perhaps, as a wooden wall in a wooden house in a forest far from here.

He had seen his breath then, too.

"They would not take me," Hannibal breathes into the darkness, an apology and plea both, the light directed downwards to his feet where all he can see is snow and mud churned by angry feet and desperate hands.

"They will not." With a sigh, he sets his feet again, one step, another, and for ten paces he does not hear the snow. But he does hear the little wet sobs, the harsh breathing; every step a heartbeat.

Somewhere warm, he decides - Italy again, Morocco after, somewhere with no snow and no frostbitten forests, somewhere far from places like this that in the earth itself carry their memories. He lifts a hand to push his hair back from his face where it’s fallen loose, and realizes he’s trembling.

“Please.” A single utterance, to himself and to them, swallowed roughly as Hannibal sets his jaw and allows no more words to pass, edging now towards the road that glistens from the dampness of the mist settling cold against him. He avoids a wide root, bracing a gloved hand against the spongy ground, and hears no cars but waits a breath, another, to steady his heart that feels so much smaller now, fluttering like a caged bird thrashing against its confining cage.

Like hers did, when his words weren't enough to soothe it and they lifted her so easily from his arms.

The wind pulls the trees towards him, it seems, an oncoming rush of sound like waves, but he raises his eyes and there is little movement in them, and still the sighing of leaves of some unseen force.

A bark shatters the quiet. A voice, unintelligible, and Hannibal shakes his head quickly. The war is not over for him, not this little boy, not when they had only just taken his sister.

Hannibal blinks, his eyes searching through the snow that isn't there for footsteps he cannot follow as the barking continues, as the dogs draw closer and this time Hannibal does not run, does not bury himself in snow and mud and hope to die.

He shuts the flashlight off and allows his back to meet another tree before his feet slip on the mud and he lowers himself to sit.

In the distance, broken apart by the zoetrope of trees, a light burns silhouettes of their tall trunks into Hannibal's eyes and then is gone just as quickly. He blinks away the afterimage, the mist he saw roiling, tries to gauge the distance of it but the cacophony of dogs disorients further, sounding altogether safely far away and far too near.

A hand over his mouth, to bring the condensation of his breath down against his chest rather than upward into the air, since his breath will not stop now, cannot with the way his pulse races like footfalls through his body. He can't pick words out of the voice he hears - wonders if it's English, if it's Lithuanian, German, Russian - none of it near enough to make sense of it, none of it clear enough to be heard over the droning hum in his ears.

Eyes flash bright in the moonlight, a heaving breath now nearly atop him, and the branches crackle and snap beneath Winston's paws as the dog bounds towards him, barking loud and boisterous and flinging himself merrily towards Hannibal.

As if they were back at the house.

Early mornings, coffee set aside to cool untouched as they joined the dogs in play.

Winston is too much a mercy for this rescue party.

Behind, more barking, in front, the same. Dogs and dogs and dogs and the slow footfalls of the commander - the owner - between the harsh yelps of joy at their discovery.

Hannibal wonders how Will did not trip with his laces so untied, but instead directs his eyes to the muzzle of his rifle. No bayonet. Not on this one. He swallows.

"A rifle, Will?"

Firearm held almost carelessly in one hand, Will tugs his shirt closed against the cold and regards Hannibal with furrowed brow for a moment more, before casting his eyes to the gun. He snorts, quiet amusement.

“All kinds of things in these woods,” he answers simply, before offering Hannibal a hand.

“You could’ve broken an ankle out here,” murmurs Will, his voice forced to a neutrality to bury the hurt, the concern beneath it that even still rustles to the surface. “Had an accident. You’re lucky I found you, Hannibal. Christ, why -”

Bottom lip licked between his teeth, Will stops himself, nearly a wince tightening his features as he shakes his head.

But I have promises to keep…

“You’re pale,” Will says instead.

And miles to go...

Hannibal considers the weapon, considers the words. Above them, the wind is stronger, a fresh gust making the leaves scream.

"I underestimated the depth of the forest."

"You were going in circles," Will tells him, a gentle implication Hannibal cannot ignore, but he frowns and raises his eyes to the sky all the same. He could have made it. One way or another. Alone or together with the little girl in his head.

"I needed to find the road."

Will’s hand - left empty where it was offered - closes on itself instead as he drops it back to hold the rifle across his body, squinting into the darkness.

“It curves,” he says. “Winds through the woods.”

He doesn’t tell Hannibal how close he was, how so long as you keep it in your sights you can’t lose it, all the way back to the city. A long walk, but without much to fear from hitch-hiking for men like him.

Like them.

“You’d have caught hypothermia out here,” Will says instead. “If you didn’t get hurt some other way.”

There is distance still, in Hannibal’s eyes, he can feel it as much as he’s certain Will can see it, unfocused and far away, between here and then, now and many years ago. Arms wrapping around himself, he makes no move to stand, until - not ungently - Will reaches to twine his fingers gently in Hannibal’s hair, picking out a leaf, mindless of the sweat and dampness made chilly in the soft strands.

“You’re going to get sick if you stay out here,” Will tells him again, the stroking of his touch slowing as Hannibal’s eyes close, and he can hear the rattled wheezing of little lungs, thick with fluid, as if she were there beside him.

"I owe her that," Hannibal murmurs but he is unsure what language he uses when Will immediately does not ask who. For a moment longer, he sits, before Buster wriggles into his lap and the heat of the dog startles Hannibal to moving.

"Did you call?"

Will's brows furrow in something akin to mild betrayal and he shakes his head. And Hannibal finds that the thought warms him a little, even if it is just the thought and nothing more.

"Will you drag me back?"

At this, Will genuinely laughs, a smile tugging his lips that Hannibal almost returns. "Will you make me?"

For a moment, Hannibal considers, that he could struggle and fight, even with the dogs here he would be strong, quick, even with the gun. But his muscles ache from the deep chill of winter and ache for the warm hands that hours before spread through his hair, the warm legs that spread around him.

Will had come out here to seek him. Not to kill, but to return.

To save.

"I will not," Hannibal responds quietly.

A cluck of tongue sends Buster scampering reluctantly out of Hannibal's lap, and Will lets the rifle hang in his hand when he reaches to gently snare Hannibal's elbow with the other. Shivering himself, now, Will still resists drawing against the man when he's standing, slumped against a tree, but allows his fingers to rest there a moment more.

"There's still dinner," he tells Hannibal, but no more than that, aware enough that Hannibal is displaced right now, in more than just the physical act of hurtling into the darkened woods.

The walk back is long - further than Hannibal realized he had gotten before the ground and memory slowed his trajectory, and brought it finally to a halt. Through the woods for a time, dogs alongside them, sniffing off in other directions before circling back to the two men who walk in cautious silence near each other. Will keeps to the fore, and does not look back to ensure that Hannibal is with him.

He knows he is, even beyond the sound of footsteps crunching over leaves and branches. He knows he will be, even as Will finds the road again and they walk alongside it, towards the little house glowing bright in the sea of primal darkness surrounding it.

The rifle is taken back to the bedroom, where Will toes off his muddied boots, before he returns to the living room to crouch, and begin the fire that Hannibal left unburning.

Questions hang between them, filling the space and making it thick as the misty air outside, just as suffocating, soaking deep into their bones.

Why did you not trust me to go with you?

Why did you not think I would find you?

Why did you think I wouldn't look?

Hannibal considers where they are. Wonders if Jack will call Will in again, or simply call in himself. He wonders why Will is so adamant to stay here and not even attempt the safety of their flight elsewhere.

Italy again, Morocco…

It is something deeper than his need to stay with the dogs, his need to keep normalcy and appearances. There is something more there and Hannibal feels entirely powerless not knowing, entirely helpless knowing he cannot ask. There is a restlessness there, an itch he cannot tend that slowly drives him to shaking. It is displeasure and longing both, needing to know and being unable to understand if he does.

There is a moment, two, before Hannibal takes the necessary steps to get to Will.

If he cannot trust him, depend on him, take Will with him, then he will kill him.

A mercy for them both, an escape they both need.

Hands find Will's throat, cold still against the warm skin there, and press, enough for Will to turn, for his eyes to widen before Hannibal kisses him, a deep and lingering thing, and his hands release to spread down Will's back and hold him close.

A sound, deep and primal, and Will folds himself just as close, one hand in the lapel of Hannibal's coat, the other against his face to work the cold from it, to brush the ghosts away. Hannibal lets him. Feels himself fall entirely into Will, there, alive, safe, and so sure, so certain. And they had not once been hindered here, not once stopped or sought or hunted.

"Together," Hannibal murmurs, feels Will smile against him.

"Yes." Arms slink to drape over Hannibal's shoulders, to pull him closer. Needy, hot, alive, together. A mercy for them both.

An escape they both need.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> *They are here, they are together. They are home, with no one but the little family they've managed to make despite unfathomable odds that now seem so far away when such acceptance makes little more matter than the nearness of the other.*

"You're freezing," Will sighs, as if by breath alone he could warm Hannibal back to the heat he knows, adores, needs pressed against him as much as Hannibal's pale skin begs to have it pressed in turn. He holds his palms to Hannibal's cheeks, sweeps his hair back from his face, and kisses him again as he reaches to slip the man's coat from his shoulders.

Rather than let it fall to the floor, Will lays it over the crook of his own elbow, lips to Hannibal's cheek to kiss away the clammy damp, and he pushes free the buttons of Hannibal's shirt until no more remain joined, and together with the coat it is laid over the arm of the chair beside them.

Will still feels fingers, powerfully strong, settled against his throat, and swallows hard.

"I don't ever want to feel that way again," Will intones softly, eyes lifted to the man whose hands rest motionless against his back. The darkness of his tone does not ebb from his words, the emptiness darker than any wood or field that like the vacuum of a gusting wind sucked all the air from Will's lungs when he saw Hannibal gone.

Not ever again.

Hannibal responds only by bringing his hands to the front of Will's body, up to trace his cheeks and kiss him again. His lips linger, a reassurance, an apology, his hands slip lower to work the coat and shirt from Will as well.

Behind Will, the logs take, kindling already crackling and popping as the fire greedily swallows them up. The warmth is not yet all-encompassing, not yet enough to feel and be comfortable, not yet enough to feel the whole house warm with it. The dogs gather before the fire into a warm furry mass, sharing heat that way, tails lazily wagging once in a while, feet twitching, noses flaring.

Hannibal soothes the goosebumps from Will's skin with gentle fingers, their kisses long and languid now, sometimes barely brushing lips, other time deep enough to burn their lungs.

He does not want to feel that either, that tug against his chest, squeezing tangled strings against his lungs, pulling at his heart. He hums, soft, and works Will's button and fly open, pausing, briefly, when he feels nothing beneath, and his lips quirk.

That look - a hint of humor in spite of the night that presses in against them - is enough to drive Will to his toes and into a surging kiss he can hardly maintain for the grin that appears sudden and electric.

“I was in a hurry,” he murmurs, their lips not parting to form the words beyond a mumble, and Will curls his arms tighter around Hannibal’s neck until the older man lifts him enough that the pants fall away to a puddle on the floor beneath him.

They needn’t go far, Will’s toes skimming the floor as he’s carried - always a surprise, how easy it is for Hannibal - towards the bed, conveniently in the living room. Will runs his fingers up the back of Hannibal’s hair, hair soft and damp between his fingers, to bring life back into him, to send a chill through him, perhaps, that is not due to the cold.

They curl softly, to bend Hannibal’s mouth back from his own, and Will sighs, “I missed you.”

Hannibal knows it’s true, knows that the depth of the word falls far beyond its meaning. *Miss* is entirely unworthy of what Hannibal had felt, had forced himself to ignore, when he had gone into the forest without Will.

“I’m here,” he sighs, and the fingers, and Will curl against him closer as he sets the younger man to the bed, crawls to rest over him and press their lips together again.

There is something that feels entirely like home about Wolf Trap, and Hannibal is unsure why that is. The home is lived in, it is full, with life and things and a history. There is a sensation of returning to something that welcomes you, something that remembers and envelopes you. Hannibal knows why Will does not want to leave, knows that there is an ember, deep within his own chest, that heats at the thought of staying.

The chance of it.

The possibility.

No one has come yet, no one may ever. They could carve a life out together, like this, in solitude and silence.

But Hannibal cannot be idle, he would grow restless, would grow angry, his need for a feast would surface and Will would not be able to stop it, or him. Slowly, the tethers that bind them now, so close, with their knowledge and experience and time together, would wither, dry out and snap.

And that sends a shiver through Hannibal that he cannot suppress. He ducks his head and masks it as one of pleasure, as Will’s fingers work his pants undone and he arches up to help Will slide them free.

So bared, they press their bodies close, draw shared breath between their mouths, sigh together as a slow rub brings them into a tangle of limbs, legs ensnared, arms around each other, hands seeking, everywhere at once and nowhere in particular.

“I need you,” Will whispers, words drawn short on a gasp as Hannibal presses between his legs and they part, for him, only for him. “Even that long apart, Hannibal -”

Sinking against Will’s mouth to smother out the words that tear at his skin like fishhooks, Will turns from it and presses them against Hannibal’s cheek, instead, warm now, flushed dusky dark as heat builds between them, and fills the little house they both know so well.

“I don’t know what I would do if you were gone,” Will finishes, body shifting into a lazy undulation as Hannibal’s lips, tongue, teeth draw smoldering across his shoulder, down further still to his chest, a mark bitten there that forces Will’s jaw tight and his breath to draw hissing between his teeth. A laugh, huffed low against Hannibal’s hair, smoothed back from his face by gentle hands, and he sighs, “I can imagine every horrible thing in the world but that.”

It pulls, enough to almost be a physical ache, and Hannibal lets out a harsh breath.

“Don’t imagine it,” he implores, as close to an apology as he can get right then, for trying to go, for making it so far, for his impatience…

Hands skim Will’s sides and up his arms, enough to grasp his wrists and turn their palms together. The slow rocking continues, a reminder, a build up into this. Intimacy. Closeness. Every moment that Hannibal commits to memory because he knows that he will go again, if not then, then soon. When impatience would drive him, boredom would consume him, anger and blame and guilt choke him.

When closeness like this will begin to stifle.

He never wants that to happen, never with Will.

“Don’t think on it.”

Will doesn’t ask for promises, doesn’t leave room for them to be broken once they’re made, merely seals their words with a kiss, closed-lipped and held for long enough that a whimper finally forces them apart enough to breathe.

They are here, they are together. They are home, with no one but the little family they’ve managed to make despite unfathomable odds that now seem so far away when such acceptance makes little more matter than the nearness of the other.

Wrapping a leg to rest against Hannibal’s side, Will presses his heel against the older man’s thigh to rub a furtive friction between their bodies, no closeness enough yet to satisfy, no proximity of hearts or minds enough yet to settle out the adrenaline that empties now into trembling limbs and shaking fingers clutched tightly entwined.

Hannibal will stay. Will knows. He knows it in the way he knows so many things that seem unknowable to anyone outside of himself, can feel it in the little crease between Hannibal’s brows as they kiss, can taste it in the languid twists of their body.

A commitment to memory, made unnecessary for lack of absence.

“I love you.”

Will’s words are but a rustle of leaves on a sighing wind, but snap like a broken branch between them, and the silence is broken by a laugh - the joyous madness of revelation - that flutters from Will as Hannibal snares him from the bed. Arm around his waist, he holds Will suspended, and kisses his chest, heart against his lips.

The three words beat there too.

It’s strange, a fact Hannibal has known, now, for several months, though neither had spoken it, voiced it, attempted to, until Will just then. Love makes itself known in a brush of a hand, the way coffee is always there in the same chipped mug, every morning, the way someone’s voice warms when they get a call.

It’s always there.

In the snaring of claws of indecision and doubt, the fear of betrayal and the cold fingers of worry that something that you will do will upset the other, undo this thing you have.

Will has never been a ragdoll in bed, never just lying pliant to take something, and even now he bends and arches, twists and reaches, hands skimming over the scattering of random items on the windowsill - screwdrivers and feathers, pens, coins and old dog tags - to find the lube. His lips arch in a grin and Hannibal’s hands settle against his hips, turn them so Will is straddling him.

A cool, slippery grasp surrounds Hannibal’s cock and tugs from base to tip, and even as Will releases his length to settle against the heat of Will’s cleft, his eyes never leave Hannibal. Taking in the length and breadth of him, not so much a memorization as confirmation - that he is here, with the soft curls of hair and the little smile just beneath his eyes and the strength of body dwarfed only by that of the man’s presence.

Will shifts forward, hips grinding into the air, his hardness tracing glistening streaks where it brushes against Hannibal’s stomach and with slick fingers, he reaches back to graze them against his own opening. A percussive sigh, shivering tight, bursts softly from his lips as he circles one, twisting it slowly inside of himself.

“Hannibal,” Will breathes, fingers tightening into the pillow beside him, his name a promise in itself, a curse, a supplication. “Hannibal, please…”

Please don’t leave.

Please don’t get caught.

Please don’t abandon this.

Please stay.

A gasp deepens into a moan, head finally bowed, as Will works a second finger inside of himself, arm shaking under his own weight, and the weight of paranoia and pleasure bearing down his shoulders.

“Please…”

Hannibal watches, eyes hooded and hands down to stroke over Will’s thighs, over his hips and up his back, fingertips counting vertebrae as the man trembles and sighs above him. A soft groan from Hannibal when Will parts his lip to suck the skin just against the sensitive bend of his shoulder.

How many times they’ve done this, since the first time Will had pressed himself close and kissed away all protest Hannibal might have had. How many times since, and never once has it felt stale, felt overdone and dull. Always warmth, always an electric pleasure and a delicious coiling anticipation.

“Let me,” he sighs, and it’s like a plea, a way to reconcile, to prove, to bridge that trust again that both have broken, both have tried to fix. Will moans, both hands down to rest against Hannibal’s chest and he arches, brings their lips together again as Hannibal sits back further, half up against the headboard, one hand down to stroke himself, the other to stroke the inside of Will’s thigh until he spreads them further.

It’s a gentle breach, enough to push a gasp from Will, bring a smile to Hannibal’s lips as he nuzzles softly against Will’s hair and breathes in the heat pulsing from him.

Will stretches, a catlike arch in his back, thighs spreading wide over Hannibal, hips lifted and lowering slow, as slow as he can stand, to feel Hannibal widen him, the sensation as familiar as his own fingers had been, the weight and warmth and girth of him. His arms frame Hannibal’s face, elbows on his shoulders and fingers in his hair, and for long minutes there is little more than the high gasps and low rumbles and the crackle of fire now snapping brightly.

A unity found, as Will finally settles with a groan across Hannibal’s hips, to breathe as a whole again so joined, and so soon after Will wondered if he would ever feel so complete again. In that moment, his tremulous breath shakes into a laugh, sweeping sweetly against Hannibal’s ear.

Dragging his hands from Hannibal’s hair, Will presses his fingers into Hannibal’s stomach, and with a crooked smile reminds himself to feed the man when they’re done here. The older man leans, enough, to taste Will’s blush, spilling bright as blossoms from the bridge of his nose, across his cheeks, lips red as roses petals, as Will pushes his hips slowly outward as he leans onto his knees, to draw Hannibal nearly out of himself.

And then just as achingly slow, jaw slack in a genuine smile of delight, press him back inside.

A familiar lovemaking, patient and sincere, hands over lightly slicked skin. They share breath, sounds, bring up marks under nails and press them white again with fingertips.

Hannibal moves first, to turn them again, to push Will against the pillows and press himself in faster, deeper, to feel Will groan and bend to him, grin and grasp him. And then it’s relentless, panted breaths and murmured promises, fingers together holding tight then relaxed, sliding over the other’s as though seeing whose palm is bigger.

It is endless motion and pleasure that pulls sounds from them louder, the longer they touch. Will draws his knees higher, shivers when Hannibal brushes over his prostate, adjusts their position to relentlessly thrust against it until Will is crying out, cursing, laughing his pleasure, hard and leaking against his stomach.

“Mercy,” Will begs breathless, pressing a hand against his face that does nothing to hide his laughter, the brilliant grin that Hannibal has made his own, only his. “Mercy, please,” another plea, trembling fingers clutching Hannibal’s chest, quickly tugged away and brought to Hannibal’s lips.

Hannibal slows just enough, bemusement crinkling his eyes, Will’s fingers held between his lips, and Will pushes with his other until Hannibal rolls to his side, and Will drives down against him, gasping as he rights himself on top again.

“Together?” he asks, swallowing hard past lips made dry by breathlessness.

“Yes,” Hannibal answers, and Will splays his fingers across Hannibal’s face, the heat of his breath all but steam against his hand, his lips fire against his palm as Will bows his head to replace it with his own mouth instead.

A rising cacophony, their own storm sweeping Will’s hips in sharp gyrations down against Hannibal inside of him, lip bitten between his teeth in concentration, holding himself back as he drives Hannibal onward. Scarlet-flushed and white-knuckled where his fingers curl marks into Hannibal’s chest, a gentle whimper snares on every breath, rising higher, in pitch, in urgency, until finally, their eyes meeting, Will nods once, and moans explosive as his body snaps rigid with release.

It takes time, for their breathing to ease, their hearts to slow, now just gentle hands slipping over sweaty skin, lips not even kissing so much as brushing and pressing together. Hannibal pulls free with a groan, feels Will shudder above him before he settles. A slow nuzzle, just the tip of Will’s nose under Hannibal’s jaw, hands sliding up to grasp Hannibal’s fingers, just to hold him.

Hannibal ducks his head to kiss Will’s soft hair, to breathe him in.

“We never actually finished dinner,” he murmurs, feels Will smile against him.

“We didn’t start it.”

Another hum, one hand up to press to his eyes and Hannibal moves as though to get up, feels Will press insistent against him, a sleepy warm weight, and relents.

“Stay,” Will smiles, sharing another kiss, lips spreading softly together, before he sits back over Hannibal’s hips.

He stretches, squints with the effort of it, and grabs the lube from where it was dropped on the bed to deposit it back onto the nightstand. It jostles amongst the odds and ends, and just as Hannibal begins to lower his hands, Will grins and catches them again.

"*Stay*," he insists with a laugh, kissing the man soundly.

It's nearly enough to cover the ratcheting whizz of a zip-tie, and not at all enough to distract from the feeling of plastic set firm against his wrist.

Hannibal jerks, a quick twist of his hand finding that the tie is holding him secure before he raises his head to see it. Black, common, something you can find at any hardware store, something Will would use regularly with his fishing gear or to keep things secure in the house.

With a displeased sound, Hannibal returns his eyes to Will.

"You're serious."

"Have I ever been anything else?"

A brow lifts and Will's smile broadens briefly before he drags his leg off Hannibal's hip and stands, with a faint flinch as he pads towards the bathroom.

"They take the handcuffs back when you leave the force, so we'll have to make do for now," he calls out, unrolling a fold of toilet paper to clean his thighs. The water runs a moment later, and he reemerges with a damp cloth, holding it folded in his hands and still out of arm's reach.

"I asked you to trust me," Will says. "And you left."

There is no great sadness in his expression now, the betrayal eased away by a peculiar contentment, as he lifts the washrag with a questioning look.

Hannibal's brows furrow but he doesn't struggle again. Knows that against this he will be powerless and a struggle would perhaps only necessitate solitude or some other form of restraint. In truth he is too contented, comfortable, to be truly upset by this, but he is entirely bewildered.

"Jack went to the house," Hannibal reminds him. "He called you in, again. He will not let this go. If we are here, he will find out eventually."

He finally nods for the cloth and shifts so he can turn his head to rest against his bound hand with a sigh.

"He will certainly find me if I am bound to your bed." Hannibal's voice lowers, amused and tired both.

Will is gentle as he wipes up the remains of their reunion, and - perhaps surprisingly - wholly unafraid despite Hannibal having use of his free hand.

"That would probably raise more questions than answers," Will grins a little, fingers lingering against Hannibal's stomach, curled in the dampened hair for a moment more before he goes to return the cloth.

“It won’t be for any longer than we need,” comes his voice, ringing from the tile in the bathroom, and he glances back out, a dark amusement gathering in the corners of his eyes. “Maybe you can get time off for good behavior.”

Will snares up their dampened clothes, hanging them over a footrest near the fire, and sifts through another pile of clothes to find a pair of sleep pants to tug on.

“Are you hungry? We started dinner but I had to turn the stove off,” he adds, rueful.

Another sound of discontent but that is all Hannibal says on the matter, lying back and waiting for Will to inevitably return to the kitchen and set the stove to heat.

It isn’t long before the house is filled with the smell of food, pan-fried rice and egg, vegetables with sticky sauce and cashew nuts. Hannibal basks in it for a while, eyes barely open, considering his current position and the reason Will had chosen it. In all fairness, the boy could have done much worse if he had wanted merely to restrain Hannibal without hope of him leaving.

What truly impresses Hannibal, though, is the nerve.

He had not been able to read this off of Will at all.

“It was nice of you to bring in the firewood,” Will remarks, once the food is finished and loaded into a bowl, balanced between his hands. The additional statement of *before you ran* is unmentioned, as Will approaches Hannibal, the first motions of apology in his gesture of food, in the tired lines ringed beneath his eyes.

His lip snags between his teeth, shifting uneasily onto one foot, toes of the other pressed to the top of it, and finally brings himself to ask, “Will you eat?”

Will you let me near?

Will you hurt me if I try?

A slow slide of dark eyes to Will before Hannibal rolls his shoulders, leans to tug the blankets up with his free hand - still aiming to be somewhat proper for dinner, even when they have had it in much more casual ways.

“Perhaps I will take your offer of food as a mercy not an indignity,” he says. “Do you plan to feed me?” It’s in jest, though Hannibal’s left hand is the one left free. He brings it to his lips and rubs there, a tell, nervousness, discomfort, before holding it out to Will, palm up, a gesture to bring him closer, welcome him there.

With a held breath, Will goes to Hannibal, the ease of his own body language betrayed by the quickness of his eyes, an alertness he can never entirely turn off. They take in the whole of Hannibal, the languor still loosening his limbs, and despite knowing how quickly Hannibal could snap every sinew of himself into savagery - and how little Will could do about it if he did - he settles onto the edge of the bed.

And then, bowl held in his lap, draws closer still to sit cross-legged beside him.

“I could,” Will muses, stirring the bowl, but without taking his eyes from Hannibal. “If you wanted.”

A brief quirk of lips, a blink, and Hannibal settles his hand gently against Will’s knee, no further. He waits, then, says nothing more, and watches as Will settles enough to bring the fork to his mouth and start on dinner. For a while Hannibal just looks at him, before turning away, past Will to see the dogs breathing almost as one creature in front of the fire, the lights in the house are all off but the glow is enough to see by.

Hannibal draws his thumb in a soft caress against Will’s knee and lets his eyes return to him.

He wonders if Will truly believes they can be here, together, like this.

“Do you believe I’ll stop?” he asks him suddenly, there is no accusation in the words, no cruelty or taunt. If anything, Hannibal sounds as though he almost hopes Will will say yes and explain to him how.

Will lowers the fork back into the bowl, shoulders drawing inward as he considers the question. A furtive glance towards the fire, another towards the bowl - quick, incidental gestures that Hannibal knows well enough from seeing Will at crime scenes, or splayed across photographs of death and dismemberment.

“Do I believe you *will*?” he repeats, focusing on Hannibal again, not his eyes but the set of his jaw, the way his throat works with the faintest thrum of tension.

“No,” Will answers, brow furrowing. “Not without extraordinary circumstances. Not without… *restraint*,” he says, and from his tone it’s clear that he means far more than the little zip-tie holding the man captive now. “To break patterns, needs that have no other outlet. If you take away the outlet, maybe…”

He trails off, and his eyes narrowing as he shakes his head. “Do I believe you *can*?” asks Will instead, and to this he nods, emphatically. “Yes. If you wanted to. If you wanted it enough.”

Hannibal just watches, astounded again by Will’s capacity for this belief, for this realistic understanding of what Hannibal is. His killings are not a compulsion, they are a habit, a release of tension. In essence, a choice.

Without the killing Hannibal would still be himself, still the man Will knows, perhaps more time to be the man Will knows without this shadow overcasting him as frequently.

Will resumes eating, eyes still on Hannibal though not as piercingly directed, softer, now, down to the hand that touches him, to the one that is bound, before he offers the bowl out to Hannibal to feed himself, if he wanted.

Another consideration, another silence, and Hannibal sighs before licking his lips and pushing himself to sit a little higher. He leans closer, parts his lips, eyes on Will.

This earns a smile, small but entirely genuine, and Will scoots a little closer to Hannibal to feed him a forkful of the stir-fried rice.

“Feeding you leftovers,” Will murmurs, darkly amused. “Already off to a bad start.”

There are little fussing gestures, between shared bites of food, as Will tucks Hannibal’s hair back from his eyes, or adjusts the blanket around him. An excuse to touch, perhaps - a reason in light of their current circumstances.

“It’s like,” Will begins, nose wrinkling in thought before he finds the words. “It’s like when you bring a new dog home. They’re nervous. They don’t want to be stuck inside a new house, but you let them outside, and they don’t know what to do with that either - so they run, to find a place they know, to find some pattern of life that they already know.”

The bowl empty, Will sets it aside on the nightstand but doesn’t draw away, hands soft against Hannibal’s chest.

“So what you do is you keep them crated, for a time, just until their nerves wear off, and everyone settles into a new routine. It seems cruel, to keep them cooped up like that, but it’s not. It’s doing them a kindness. It’s giving them a safe space to settle, where they know they can’t be harmed.”

Hannibal’s eyes narrow but not in anger. He can’t decide if he’s genuinely amused or merely astounded that such primitive methods of conditioning will be used on him. Some strange part of him is genuinely curious if they will work.

“I’ve felt safe at Wolf Trap before,” he points out. “This space has not yet been invaded as my own has, I have no reason to mistrust it.” He does not mention his trust regarding Will, he supposes the way Will’s lips lift in a smile he doesn’t mean, he can read between the lines.

“What if a dog finds itself restless, regardless of its surroundings?” he asks, settling back into bed, hand curling to hold the headboard behind him. “What if crating it creates more problems than it solves, and the creature becomes violent?”

Once more, no implication of imminent threat, and yet the statement is clear enough, the warning there, perhaps a step towards acquiescence to this, towards allowing even a little of this to even happen. Allowance that once they are together, be it here, or elsewhere, this will come up between them.

The question darkens Will’s expression a little, in the furrows of his face that dig a little deeper, as though made older by the question and all its implications. His body echoes the withdrawal, and he draws a leg to his chest, arms folded around it, and chin atop his knee.

“It’s never happened to me,” he answers. “I guess -” His words are broken by a faint smile that comes and goes and never breaks as sun through the stormclouds in his eyes, an awareness - bitter on his tongue - of his own foolishness even as he speaks. “I guess I’ve always thought that there are things that can overcome that.”

He rubs a hand across his face, eyes focused anywhere but Hannibal, and unfolds his legs only to make his way slowly to the edge of the bed.

“A comfortable home. Good food. Little pleasures. Acceptance. Kindness. Love,” he rattles off, as dismissively as he might a grocery list. He rubs his palms against his thighs, and sighs a laugh. “What would would *work*? Isolation. Restraint, for you and them. Patience.”

Standing, Will takes up the bowl and pads back towards the kitchen.

“A different kind of acceptance, I suppose, if nothing else is enough. Admission that you can’t save everyone.”

Hannibal drops his head back heavy into the pillows, says nothing. He can hear Will turn on the tap, a long time as he adjusts the temperature before there’s the sound of clinking dishes and displaced water as Will washes them.

Everything in Will’s behavior points to delusion if Hannibal didn’t know better. If he didn’t know Will. Instead, with what he does know, it points to a true, almost desperate need to help, a want to. To keep him close, to keep him here, to keep them together. Hannibal knows that were he to ask Will now, to leave, to go, he would be denied, but he would not be ignored.

He does not want to be saved.

He doesn’t need to be saved.

But the idea of Will ignoring him, isolating him, restraining -

Hannibal turns his head to rub his eyes with his right hand and brings his left up to run through his hair.

Do I believe you can stop?

In the kitchen, the water shuts off, the pipes in the house groan briefly as they adjust to the pressure easing. The light goes off there, leaving just the fire, now, to light the open-plan area they share.

Yes.

Hannibal swallows, keeps his eyes closed as Will makes his way around the room to check on the dogs, to stoke the fire to keep it burning many hours more and hold the heat within the house. That yes, that belief in him is enough for Hannibal to feel his heart hammer, to have his mind turn over itself as he thinks of Will’s words that followed, the soft lack of implication that spoke volumes.

“Will?” he asks softly.

The younger man stands, storing the poker back beside the fireplace, and dusts his hands against his pant legs. With a shiver, he slides a sweatshirt from beneath one of the dogs and tugs it on over his head, and goes about scooping up the now-dry clothing, exhaustion loosening his limbs, burdens bending low his shoulders.

He hums, in response, a question, before murmuring, “If you need something, I can get it for you. Just tell me and I will.”

Hannibal turns his head, watches him. Tired in so many more ways than just physical.

“Will you come here?” he asks after a pause, shifting enough that were Will to sit down they would be closer.

A long look is given to the man, as Will tosses his own clothes to the floor of the closet, and takes down hangers for Hannibal’s. A look that carries not accusation, but a quiet acceptance, that for all Hannibal’s talk of becoming violent, Will knows all too well exactly what possibilities that entails.

He hangs the clothes, removes his slippers, and steps closer, to stand beside the bed, quiet.

Hannibal cocks his head, lets out a breath, but does not force Will closer than where he wants to stand.

“Will you allow me to accept your request, with an addendum?” he asks, waits, watches the way Will responds to the words, to the suggestion of them, the way he sets his hands gently against his hips, not folding them to close himself off, not allowing full acceptance. Hannibal continues when there is no interruption incoming.

“I want to be safe,” he says, “with you. Wherever we can be. Together.” A breath, held, released. “I shall not leave. I shall not struggle from your bonds, and prove it to you. I will trust that you know, that you understand, and that we can make this work, if you believe it is viable.”

Dark eyes raise to meet Will’s.

“But if the safety of the house, of us, is compromised by circumstances outside of your control you must allow me to... correct them. Before we find another place to try.” Hannibal does not blink, a bare movement of just the muscles on his lower eyelids enough to suggest he is controlling it. “Please trust me to keep us safe, if your method fails.”

Chewing his lower lip, Will lets their gaze to remain joined a moment more before he nods. No more questions to ask for now, no more reiterations of the promises Hannibal has just made to him. In their time together, the man has not lied to him - not truly - and Will allows himself the belief that now is no different.

“Okay,” he answers, no more than that, and slowly seats himself in the space Hannibal has made for him, on the bed beside. “Okay.”

Another breath released, soft, slow, and Hannibal sets his hand against the mattress near Will’s thigh, palm up, inviting a touch, waiting for Will to take it.

When he does, slow, almost reluctant, Hannibal brings it to his lips, eyes closing as he kisses the knuckles, the slender fingers, the tips of them. Then he turns his head against Will’s hand, nuzzles the comfort of it.

Will stops himself from saying more, when so much already has been said tonight, in words and around them. His touch brushes soft across Hannibal's eyelids, fingers outstretched, as the man presses Will's hand to his cheek, turns his nose against it and kisses his palm. The next kiss is gathered against Will's lips, instead, leaning down above the older man, further and further still until he slides onto the bed beside him, and wraps their legs together.

A precarious position, and the safest place that Will can imagine, all at once.

"Together," Will agrees softly, and he traces the lines of Hannibal's nose with his fingertip. "By whatever means we must."

Hannibal lies still a moment, perplexed as to why Will is so open, so prepared to lie with him this way if he went through the precaution of tying him down. Astounded. Touched.

He curls his arm up, over Will's hair, against it to hold him close, gentle, carding his fingers through the curls there. He settles further down the bed, allows Will to wriggle until he's comfortable, until he has pulled the blankets up against them both.

"Whatever means," he agrees softly, pressing his lips to Will's temple.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> *“I look at evidence, Jack. You make me look beyond it, but I can only go with what I can see.” Will brings up a hand in a gesture suggesting a shrug. “All I knew about Hannibal Lecter, I’ve told you. All I know is what he told me and what I saw. Nothing more or less than that.”*
>
> *“You were intimate.”*
>
> *“We were close,” Will corrects, tersely.*

It is late afternoon by the time Hannibal feels Will’s frustration grow to a noticeable level.

True to his word, Hannibal had not made any attempts to leave Wolf Trap again. He was allowed the use of the bathroom and shower that morning, allowed to dress if he so chose, before finding his right hand - lovingly - tethered to the bed once more.

Trust is earned, after all.

And true to his word, Will had done everything in his power to make Hannibal comfortable for the time of his partial captivity. Books, food, drink. Keeping the dogs away so Hannibal could have at least a little space within the small house while Will marked his papers at the desk by the door.

But it seems that Will’s demands on someone’s time and Hannibal’s are different. Amusingly so for the tethered party and less so for the one offering to be at the beck and call. Hannibal chews his lip to hide a smile as Will returns with yet another glass of water and sets it down a little too hard on the side table.

“Will you stay?” Hannibal asks him.

Will's jaw tightens, forward and back, just a little before a soft smile suggests itself.

"Now, or as a whole?"

Hannibal's lips curve a little higher. "Now."

Mouth pursing, Will glances towards his desk, paperwork yet unworked, towards Hannibal, spread comfortably in soft pants and a sweater beneath him.

"Last time I did, you were immediately hungry."

He catches the slight narrowing of the older man's eyes, a genuine - if petty - amusement.

"In truth, I was hungry before that," he responds, chin lifting with a little smile that despite his patient annoyance turns Will's heart over entirely. "I only wished your company more than a meal, and so once that was satisfied..."

He shrugs, and Will lets his attention follow from the movement, up his arm. With a sigh, he sits beside Hannibal on the edge of the bed, and without thought, rubs his fingers deep against the man's pale forearm. It's become a habit, this, Will's wariness of Hannibal's discomfort made transparent.

Hannibal snares Will’s arm and holds him close, the grip easy to break were Will truly determined to go. For the moment, he does not.

"Is it so terrible?" Hannibal asks, head cocked and eyes narrowed. He knows his answer. Knows Will’s response is both a yes and a no, one short term the other its opposite, yet watching Will partially glare at him is well worth the rhetorical question.

"If I could have the iPad -"

"Tomorrow."

"And what difference would a day make?" Hannibal smiles. "Beyond the ease with which I could gather my information, thus rendering many of my requests to you unnecessary, and your time to you more quickly."

Will regards Hannibal from beneath messy hair before working to extricate himself.

"Trust,” is all he says, and Hannibal sighs. The word has become like a mantra in a self-help program. Necessary but the sound of it is almost grating.

"Will you bring your work here?" he asks after a time, still holding to Will’s arm despite his gentle protestations.

A moment passes before Will’s brows knit and he laughs, chagrined. “What information are you gathering?” He stands, arm still held, and regards Hannibal with a softening just beneath his eyes, a fondness he can’t help no matter how impossible his charge has become.

“You have to let me go so I can get it. I’ll come back,” he insists, exhaling long as Hannibal relents, and he can gather his paperwork. “Do you want anything while I’m up?”

A hum, considering, and Hannibal watches Will’s shoulders tense in that irritating anticipation that he cannot help but prolong. In truth, he needs very little. Occasionally something to drink, occasionally freedom to relieve himself. The rest is simply the want for company, the closeness of Will beside him. Closeness that were he not bound he would easily satisfy on his own.

Small touches, kisses, drawing Will back against him as he passes on his way to the kitchen - on his own.

Hannibal says something, the word foreign and lyrical, and Will snorts, shuffling a few more papers together.

"I have no idea what that is, Hannibal. A dish, a person -"

The silence draws long between them, and when Will finally turns, Hannibal's expression is one of absolutely shocked delight.

"Funny."

"I merely requested something sweet. You happened upon a clever solution on your own."

"Something - in what language?"

"Does it matter?"

"It does if I don't speak it. We happen upon some fairly fatal misunderstandings then, clearly."

Hannibal's lips work not to laugh and he feels that tug again, wanting Will close to kiss and caress and delight in. He licks his lips, raises a gentle eyebrow as he waits for Will to continue taking up what he needs.

“I suppose ‘fatal’ is another poor choice of words,” Will adds, rueful, forcing the smile that begs at the corners of his lips into something resembling a stern expression. Papers tucked beneath his arms, he stops into the kitchen and returns with a seemingly innocuous blue box in his hand. Hannibal’s attention falls on it, narrows, and Will shakes his head as he approaches.

“Don’t start,” Will murmurs. “You want sweet, this is what I have.”

The Oreos are tossed onto the bed first, the papers dropped next, and pen held between his teeth as Will slinks onto the mattress beside Hannibal, removing several books, a sweater that was decided to be insufficient, and an expensive lotion after Hannibal complained of dry hands.

Another hum of displeasure but the older man merely sinks further into bed as Will sets up as best he can with the far from ideal location for marking.

"I wish you did not have to lower yourself to such things," Hannibal laments softly, "I could make you chocolate so delicate it would melt in your mouth. Cream so light it feels like a breath. And this..." Another frown towards the utterly blameless cookies. "This is insufficient."

"The lack of chocolate soufflé with any number of expensive liqueurs will not kill you." Will raises an eyebrow. "Nor will an Oreo."

"You seem so certain," Hannibal responds, almost haughty as having his tastes so disregarded. Will merely hums, spinning the pen between his fingers as he skims the first paragraph of the paper again.

"You're still here," Will answers dryly.

“I was not aware I had a say in the matter,” chides Hannibal, and Will’s smile widens despite his best attempts to suppress it.

“Nor do you have a say in cookies, at the moment. Christ, you’re high-maintenance.”

At this, Hannibal seems to unfurl with a peculiar pride that - for his inherent smugness - has never ceased to charm Will against his wishes. “And this not even a fraction of it,” Hannibal purrs, turning onto his side to lay coiled around where Will sits. “You, of everyone, must know what is required of me daily to keep up appearances.”

Will settles a hand against Hannibal’s back, chewing his pen and trying not to look as Hannibal presses his lips to his thigh. “I’m starting to get a clearer picture,” he snorts. “Mostly of how insufficient my own maintenance is, by compare. ‘Will, this shampoo has sodium laureth sulfate in it, you do not need that, it adds bubbles with no purpose’ and ‘Will, Winston has shed upon my pillow, do you have another cover, a softer one perhaps’ and…”

"I have no doubt that were I to tether you to my bed, I would find you similarly demanding," comes the warm hum against Will’s leg.

"For normalcy, perhaps," Will laughs, relenting, at last, to stroke his hand through Hannibal’s hair.

"I would tether you until such things were no longer normal to you."

"Manipulation?"

"Re-education."

"Hannibal, I need to work."

Despite the laughter in the tone, Hannibal relents the teasing, moves to rest against Will as best he can and allows himself to doze. Outside, the rain begins again, soft at first, then heavy, like a sheet of white noise surrounding the house. It's then that Hannibal remembers falling into a deep enough sleep that Will’s gentle jostling to keep the dogs off the bed does not bother him.

Will brings Hannibal better chocolate, the next time he goes out for groceries.

And gradually, over days, the zip ties come less urgently, less frequently. Hannibal cooks, once in a while, in large part to satisfy his own demands - and resolve his insistence that Will uses far too much salt - and so that Will can shoulder against him softly. They sit on the couch sometimes, working and reading together. The tablet remains unseen, but it matters little when Will so readily distracts Hannibal from his desire for it, with teasing words and sweetly begging lips.

So entwined, Will stretches, spreading his legs across Hannibal’s lap and curling onto his side on the couch. A hum when Hannibal resettles his book against Will’s leg, thumb softly stroking his calf, and Will glances towards him with a smile, head ducked against his arm.

“Maybe,” Will ventures, voice rough after spending the morning in comfortable silence, “maybe we could go for a wa-”

The dogs outside set to barking, an exuberant sound that provides only a moment of notice before the sound of an engine can be heard approaching. Wheels against the long gravel driveway, and Will slings himself to his feet to hurtle towards the door.

The house itself shows little to no sign of another person living here, or perhaps Will is just so used to it that the fact that he doesn’t notice is worrying. A quick scan of the kitchen shows nothing out of place, nothing obviously not *his*. By the time he looks to the living room again, Hannibal is nowhere to be seen, his book and his sweater - discarded earlier - gone, even the pillows adjusted to be plump, not leaned against as though a body had only moments before occupied the space.

It is frightening how quickly Hannibal can disappear from Will’s life, in quite literally the blink of an eye as though he never was, and Will suppresses a brief moment of genuine panic that he’s gone.

Will tugs on his pants, slips a loose sweater over his head and goes to hold the screen door open, watching Jack’s black sedan pull up and park at an angle by the porch.

“I heard some of the roads were closed because of the rain,” Jack comments, stepping around a particularly offensive puddle as he shuts the door and makes his way to the three small stairs needed to stand on the porch. “I hope you haven’t been short on supplies.”

Will holds the screen open for Jack to step through, alongside several of the dogs who vigorously shake off the rain before leaving wet paw prints back towards the fire.

“I’ve been making do,” he answers, hesitant, before adding, “but I’ve missed the free lunches at Quantico. Peanut butter sandwiches only go so far before you just give up - end up eating peanut butter straight out of the jar.”

He starts to fold his arms, loosens them, and then folds them anyway, following Jack further into the house taking his hat and coat as they’re removed and hanging them beside the door.

“Unless you’ve come to bring me a pizza, I can’t imagine that you’re here to talk about food,” Will notes, rueful, but without any rancor, passing by again to jab the coffeemaker to life since it’s apparent that Jack is going to be a while. He doesn’t let himself think of Hannibal beyond a brief, silent curse of gratitude that the man has gone, and another that he may be gone entirely.

He can’t let himself think of him - can’t let his features show anything but his usual level of surly patience.

A hum as Jack takes in Will’s home, as he always does, lets his eyes linger on the fishing lures that had once brought him so much trouble, on the dogs that make themselves comfortable by the fire, the unmade bed with its tangled sheets and pillows in the middle of the mattress.

“There was nothing at Hannibal Lecter’s house that suggested where he was going,” he says at length, something Will knows, that Jack knows he knows. He frowns, says nothing as he pulls down two mugs, sugar from the pantry, milk from the fridge that he checks with a cursory sniff. “Nothing at the airports to suggest he bought a ticket.”

“He wouldn’t buy it under his name,” Will responds, tone low, eyes down at his work.

“No one matching his description seen there, either,” he adds, and Will just shrugs.

“I’m not an escape artist, Jack. He - in all likelihood - is.”

“What makes you say that?”

Jack settles in at the table, removing his gloves and pocketing them, as Will takes the moment of distraction to set his previous mug in the sink, so that only Hannibal’s remains on the table near the couch. He paces out to retrieve it, giving it a rinse before setting it beside the clean one for Jack.

“It’s unlikely that the Ripper murders were his first,” Will begins, tasting the words as he says them, letting them flow from the space he imagines at the base of his skull, that holds these realizations, information that seems inconsequential until it isn’t. “Extremely unlikely, in fact, at his age. It’s almost unheard of for someone to begin this type of behavior so late in life, so the assumption,” he emphasizes, tapping the filling coffee pot with a fingernail, “is that he’s done this before.”

Full enough to pour for Jack, he brings the mug to the table, and sets the coffee and sugar beside. He knows the man takes two spoons of coffee, just a drop of milk, but doesn’t presume to do it for him. Practiced ignorance, from many years of needing to appear as less observant.

Normal.

Will sighs, continues. “So he’s either an extraordinary anomaly, Jack, or he’s been transient in his life. Moving from place to place, resettling, building again. You saw the passports he left, you think he can’t duck bored airport security?”

“I think that you’re asking the wrong man for information I don’t have,” Will finally replies, resting his weight against the table, arms spread, leaning just over his mug. “I look at evidence, Jack. You make me look beyond it, but I can only go with what I can see.” He brings up a hand in a gesture suggesting a shrug. “All I knew about Hannibal Lecter, I’ve told you. All I know is what he told me and what I saw. Nothing more or less than that.”

“You were intimate.”

“We were close,” Will corrects, tersely, feels Jack lean back just enough to suggest he’s not going to push the matter. Today.

“You were close. And nothing in the last few days before his miraculous departure suggested where he was going or what he would do?”

Will's eyes settle on the man in front of him, there are lines on Jack's face suggesting exhaustion that is far beyond the physical, deep stress lines on his brow, beneath his eyes. He has aged, Will thinks, as Bella has gotten worse.

"I told you that he would go. I told you that at one point he wanted to go with me. I am right here, Jack, he found me a liability and left me behind. Miraculously," he adds, tilting his head, "alive. The most I can do is help you track him down if you have evidence for me to see. Though I doubt he would be reckless enough to take his culinary habits public overseas."

"Overseas," Jack repeats. "You seem certain he's left the states."

Will rolls his eyes towards the ceiling, slumping back into his chair, and shrugs. "Wouldn't you?"

"Seems risky to me."

"Staying's risky too. The travel - getting there - would be difficult, but it would be simpler enough to blend in where you're not being shown in the papers every day."

"The papers seem to think he's gone overseas, too," Jack notes, tone lifting curiously.

"And you know how right they are," sighs Will, shaking his head to clear the distraction and leaning forward, arms folded over the table. "He talked a lot about Europe. Went to school in France. Favors Italy - the music, museums, culture. He knows those places, knows them well. Hell, he may have safehouses already set up there - it's not as though he hadn't planned for this happening."

Jack listens, uninterrupting. He lets it uncoil, and Will does, almost as though the words are outside of his control.

Almost.

"Check Italy," Will decides. "He'll be attracted to the splendor of it. Grandeur. An appropriately palatial place to match his own ego. You're not going to find him in Germany, Poland, even England is too grey. Check private airports, too. Less security to worry about. He'll have another name - something *punny* I imagine - and may have altered his appearance. Jack," sighs Will, suddenly, a pluck of frustration, "I'm not telling you anything you don't already know."

"Which is why I'm hoping for more," Jack replies, but it's not an implication for Will to speak again, more a closed statement, a disappointment that Will notices is aimed more inwards than projected at him. Jack sighs and takes up his coffee, humming at the taste but not commenting on it before he sets it down and settles his fingers against the base.

"Freddie Lounds was all over that crime scene," he comments, "despite her being legally *dead*. That woman gives a whole new meaning to posthumous publication."

Will allows himself a smile at that, fiddles with is own mug, lets his eyes linger on the table between them so they don't slide towards the door leading to the basement. Hoping Hannibal

is there, safe, and not out in the forest, taking his leave while both he and Jack are distracted by each other.

Jack leans forward, settles his hands together, fingers laced, and after a moment raises his eyes to Will until the profiler obliges him and lifts his own. He wishes his glasses were there to cut the direct stare in half.

“I just want to know why he left you behind, when you were so adamant that he would leave a massacre were you to be kept from him.”

Lower lip drawn between his teeth, Will focuses on the coffee in front of him, watches the steam rise from it in lazy twists and turns.

“I’ve stopped wondering,” Will answers, truthfully. “Why he didn’t force me to go. Why he didn’t just leave me bleeding, no witnesses if he’d timed it right - days, maybe weeks until someone even found me.”

He rolls his shoulder, a tired ache deep-set within over which he rests his hand, frowning.

“Maybe he wants someone to able to speak for him,” adds Will, tone softening. “Someone who could look and understand and *know*. Dispel the misinformation. Keep the legend of the Ripper going.” A quick shake of his head, and Will mutters into his mug. “Or maybe he’s just hoping I’ll follow.”

“Will you?”

Will snorts. “Follow him to where I don’t know he is? Doubtful.”

Jack considers this, brings the mug to his lips again for a thoughtful sip. One of the dogs sidles up beside him at the table and sits, head cocked and one ear bent out of shape. Jack allows his hand to stroke between the dog’s ears.

“He will not go away, Will,” Jack says quietly. The dog at his side, having gotten what he sought, stands to pad away to the fire again. “Hannibal Lecter’s name will be on the pages of every paper, we will not stop hunting him down until we find him and he’s brought back here.”

Will just raises his eyes, brings the mug to his lips and pretends to take a drink, stomach squirming with the desire to remove all its contents.

“And you are our expert, you are the man who knows him inside out, has seen through his eyes and survived him. I,” Jack sighs, taps his fingers against the table before finally pushing himself to stand up, dragging his gloves from his pocket and gently unfurling them before putting them on. “I just want you to know that I will call on you again about him. Often.”

A look of disbelief, nose wrinkling in brief displeasure, before Will presses his lips together and snorts, softly, “I wish I knew what it took for you to trust me, if everything so far hasn’t been enough.”

Jack smiles, genuine, and settles his hat onto his head. “It’s not you that I don’t trust, Will.”

There's little more to be said beyond that, as Will stretches from the table and follows him towards the door, out onto the porch.

"Next time bring a pizza," Will remarks, and Jack lifts his hand in amusement and farewell both, though it does little between either man to disperse the tension strummed electric between them, a dissonant feedback that lingers long after the black sedan has rolled back down the gravel, and vanished onto the main road back to Baltimore.

Will doesn't release the breath he's been holding until the dogs are ushered back inside, and the screen and door are both locked. It is explosive, dizzying, and his lungs stay snapped tight as he pulls open the basement door, and tries to listen past the sound of his heart hammering in his chest.

Within, the basement is silent, dusty and dark despite the earliness of the day, and Will swallows before taking the necessary few steps to get to the bottom. It's colder down here, and his arms come up on instinct to wrap around himself, pressing into his arms as he lets his eyes adjust.

He sees no one and nothing. Just the quiet echo of rain from above, motes of dust meandering across his line of sight as Will lets out a long breath and ducks his head.

Trust.

Taken and held before it flies swift from his grasp. Will wonders if the zip ties did anything but irritate the man, if his company was only as good as the time Hannibal could see him. Object permanence, object impermanence. There and gone again, rinse repeat.

For a moment more, Will stands, before he straightens his shoulders and moves to return upstairs, finding, instead, warm hands where his own had slid from his arms, holding him still, gently pulling him close.

"You sent me to Florence," Hannibal murmurs, ducking to nuzzle soft behind Will's ear before kissing there. "Apparently two weeks ago. I do hope you booked me into first class, it would be unbecoming otherwise."

Will exhales shaking, relief that Hannibal is there, relief that his arms are warmly wrapped around Will's waist and not his throat, a sudden rush that turns him to face Hannibal and loop his arms over the older man's shoulders.

"I sent you several times," he sighs. "Private and commercial airports. Someone saw you there and informed security, but you couldn't be found. They took down the report and filed it away."

He leans back, trying to hide the trembling in his hands by pressing his palms, cold, to Hannibal's cheeks.

"Hotels around the city, very nice ones. You checked in by phone to one before you went to the wine country by train."

Lips quirking, Will ducks his head beneath Hannibal's chin, and breathes warm against the hollow of his throat.

"Sorry for the charges on your cards."

"Use them until they're maxed," Hannibal murmurs, lifting Will's chin again to kiss him, a deep thing, slow, lingering in a way that feels different, warmer, *more* somehow.

Will had sent him away, he had sent away Hannibal Lecter the monster, the man on the run from the police, unarmed but incredibly dangerous. Will had sent Hannibal the Cannibal to Europe, he had sent him through airports and boatyards and into expensive taxis and penthouse hotel suites.

"You are extraordinary," he whispers, feels Will shiver and kisses him again.

He had found his tablet on top of his many unpacked things in the basement, the battery barely alive but receiving the internet. It had been enough. One small headline in an Italian newspaper, search results, another, more, back and back to two weeks, to just before the storm, the forest. Will had secured them before Hannibal had thought to try himself.

Will turns his head aside just enough to breathe, to wrap his hands over Hannibal's and warm him, warm himself. He sees the tablet there and smiles, just a little, eyes closing as Hannibal scatters kisses through his hair and sighs heat against him.

"We'll go," confirms Will softly, all but limp against Hannibal, weakened by the sudden openness shared between them after holding it for so long inside. Tension strips from him with every kiss, with every breath that confirms that Hannibal is here, with him, that they are whole still, with neither giving up more than they must.

He swallows hard, and gathers Hannibal's fingers against his lips.

"We'll go on our own time. Another few weeks, at most, time for Jack to follow up on the leads, to start chasing them."

A note of concern plucks in Hannibal's voice when he echoes, "Jack. He said he would call on you. Often."

"He will. Several more times. I don't know anything more than what I told him," Will murmurs, before dropping Hannibal's hands and stepping back from him, unsteady. Uneven steps and curved shoulders, as if he might fall in a harsh wind, and Will grinds his hands against his eyes before folding his arms softly around himself. He appears older, suddenly, expression drawn and eyes focused on some middle space towards the floor, exhausted.

"I don't know anything else," he says, voice cracking, hardly above a whisper. "And every time he asks, it's killing me. I got too close, I know I did, but I had to and," a rough sigh shatters his words before they come back a little more forceful, but with no more strength. "And the looks, and the accusations - they don't need to say anything for me to see them - I can't anymore. I did what I could, and it - it wasn't enough. And I can't any more. And I'm going. Somewhere fucking," he laughs, joyless, "fucking far away from all of this."

And just as quickly as Will drew far inside himself, he returns. His hands drop to his sides, and despite the redness in his eyes he turns a soft smile towards Hannibal, nearly coy.

“And then we go.”

Hannibal blinks, astounded by the transformation as he always has been by just Will Graham in general. Then he tilts his head, watches Will furl back to himself, unfold back into his form like smoke and mist.

It is beautiful to watch.

“And then we go,” he agrees, takes the necessary steps to get to Will and lowers himself to his knees before him, eyes up before he rests his forehead to Will’s stomach and breathes, just breathes in the man before him.

“Morocco,” he sighs after a moment, “Tunisia. Egypt. Let them chase the monster across Europe and into Africa as we leave it. Let them dig through the sands and dive the rivers and find his shadow and reputation.”

Will stands square on his feet now, no weakness felt as Hannibal runs his hands to Will’s legs, finds strength there instead.

Stability, shared between them both.

He curls his fingers through Hannibal’s hair, rests the others against his cheek, and murmurs, “To some cabin, up north. Take the dogs with us. If Jack goes out of his way he can find me, but in time, he’ll stop. Less and less. And all of us there, together.” Tilting his head, he watches Hannibal knelt before him, and says gently, “If you can let the monster go.”

A pause.

“Though if not,” Will adds, dark humor in his little smile, “in places that remote, there are always plenty of hikers who go missing.”

End Notes

Redamancy: The act of loving in return.

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